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## **New Work at *Aeclanum* (Comune di Mirabella Eclano, Provincia di Avellino, Regione Campania)**

Girolamo F. De Simone and Ben Russell

The University of Edinburgh and Apolline Project collaboration at *Aeclanum* is the result of an agreement with the Soprintendenza per le provincie di Salerno ed Avellino and the Comune di Mirabella Eclano and is associated with the British School at Rome. Directed by Dr Girolamo F. De Simone and Dr Ben Russell, the project also involves the Accademia di Belle Arti di Napoli and the Università degli Studi del Sannio at Benevento, as well as specialists from the Universities of Cambridge, Napoli-Federico II, Napoli-Suor Orsola Benincasa, Padova, Prague, Roma-La Sapienza, St Andrews, Sydney, Tokyo, UCL, and Western Ontario. The first full season of excavation and survey took place in 2017.

*Aeclanum* lies beyond the shores of the Bay of Naples in the inland Campanian district of Irpinia (ancient *Hirpinia*), which in antiquity constituted the southern part of Samnium, on the fringes of Campania and Apulia. The city seems to have been founded in the 3rd c. BC. It was sacked by Sulla in 89 BC, turned into a colony under Hadrian in AD 120, and finally developed into an important Christian bishopric between the 4th and 7th centuries AD. The city owed its status to its position on the Via Appia and its influence seems not to have declined after the construction of the Via Traiana (which effectively bypassed it).

The first collection of inscriptions and artefacts from the site was made by Cassitto in the mid-1700s and since then *Aeclanum* has received intermittent attention, with the most substantial excavations undertaken by Onorato in the 1950s (Onorato 1960; Colucci Pescatori 2017). Among the structures brought to light by this work were a *macellum*, a large early Christian basilica, a substantial bath complex, and a residential area containing several imperial-period *domus*; this final area also produced a late-antique pottery kiln and evidence for a glass workshop (Lombardo 1977, 815-16). Rescue excavations in the 2000s on the edge of the site uncovered extensive Roman and late antique cemeteries (Lo Pilato 2005), workshops and public buildings, including one identified as a nymphaeum, within which was found an imperial statue, probably of Marcus Aurelius (Mesisca, Lazzarini and Salvadori 2013, 76-7, fig. 9a).

All of these finds suggest a considerable level of wealth at *Aeclanum* during the Roman and late antique periods. *Hirpinia* was an important supply region for the coastal cities of Campania, providing timber and livestock (De Simone *et al.* 2013), and a major concern of the project will be clarifying *Aeclanum*'s economic connections. The site was well connected: on the Via Appia, the most important road in Roman Italy, and close to the river Calore. Unlike the coastal cities of *Pompeii* and *Herculaneum*, *Aeclanum* was not destroyed in AD 79 by the eruption of Vesuvius but continued to thrive well beyond this. The site was hit, however, by a significant earthquake in c. AD 346 and then the Vesuvian eruption of AD 472.

### **The 2017 excavations:**

Key aims of the project involve the study of the urban development of the city and the environment of its region, especially its economic output and the connections that existed between it and the plains of Campania and Apulia. Our holistic approach to the site encompasses restoration activities and public archaeology, coordinated with the

local Comune and geared primarily towards school children, to better preserve the site and foster a sense of ownership among the local population.

Four areas of excavation were opened in 2017: one in the area of a monumental structure, previously assumed to be a *nymphaeum* (Area A); a second in the largest excavated structure in the city, the baths (Area B); a third in a central area which geophysics suggested was residential zone (Area C); and a fourth in what appears to be the public core of the city, containing a *macellum* (Area D).

Results from Area A show that this building is in fact the city's theatre. To judge from the extant architectural decoration, it was built or at least heavily refurbished in the Julio-Claudian period (Mesisca, Lazzarini and Salvadori 2013; Mesisca 2015). Our work suggests that it started to be systematically dismantled in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Around this same date, in the baths (Area B), a series of alterations to the structure of the complex were exposed: a new mosaic, which has been conserved, and a room with a floor paved in *verde antico* and white; this later room contained primary volcanic deposits associated with the AD 472 eruption of Vesuvius (on which more below). In Area C, a collapsed structure was excavated, perhaps a house or workshop. Finally, in Area D, geophysics and excavation explored not just the *macellum* but also identified an adjacent open paved area, almost certainly the city's forum.

### **The GPR survey:**

Geophysics plays a key role in our work and is coordinated by Dr Guglielmo Strapazzon. In 2016 and 2017 GPR survey was undertaken across roughly 5 hectares of the site. The results have significantly increased our understanding of the topography of the city. At the northern end of the site, the remains of two enclosures interpreted as porticoed squares were identified, the northern one joining with the baths and the southern one aligned with a public building to the south, possibly a gymnasium or cultic complex. The width of the north-south road, over 5 m, suggests it is the Via Appia, the exact route of which through the city is unknown. West of the excavated *macellum*, the GPR found the large open area mentioned in the description of Area D above. This open area is represented by a hard surface, probably the concrete preparation of a public piazza. Porticoes are visible on the GPR along the east and south sides of this space.

### **Natural disasters and the late history of the site:**

Earthquake damage was identified in both Areas C and B. In the former, the ceramics suggest that the collapsed wall, probably of a domestic structure, was brought down in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is tempting to connect this with the well-known earthquake(s) that hit central Italy in AD 346 (Galadini and Galli 2004). In the baths (Area B), the new mosaic and marble floor were set on make-up layers of rubble which substantially elevated the height of the floors; this rubble make-up layer contained fourth-century AD pottery and it is therefore likely that these new floors represent repairs and alterations to the baths following the same eruption.

The second major natural disaster attested archaeologically at *Aeclanum* for the first time by the current excavations is the Vesuvian eruption of AD 472. On top of the marble floor in the baths (Area B) a primary volcanic deposit was discovered, which volcanological analysis indicates belongs to the eruption of AD 472. Following the earthquake of AD 346 then, the baths were remodelled, and continued in use for over a century until the eruption of AD 472 led to their abandonment and almost immediate spoliation.

The discovery of volcanic deposits connected to AD 472 eruption at *Aeclanum* has important implications for our understanding of late antique Campania. They show that the eruption's ash cloud spread north-east, beyond previous reconstructions (Rolandi, Munno, Postiglione 2004). The depth of the ash shows that the impact of this eruption this far east was significant. Excavations closer to Vesuvius have revealed the impact of the AD 472 eruption in the immediate vicinity of the mountain (De Simone *et al.* 2011) – and we hear from historical sources that the ash cloud blocked the sun across a wide area, and even as far as Constantinople – but the evidence from *Aeclanum* is the first from an Italian site this far east.

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